

DISCOVERY CLAIM

Bonanza Creek



It was at this point on Bonanza Creek, marked by a National Historic Sites cairn, that gold was found in 1896, and set off the Klondike Stampede of 1898.

The event captured the imagination of the western world. More than \$500 million dollars worth of gold was ultimately taken from the frozen ground.

Tipped off by veteran prospector Bob Henderson, George Carmack and his fishing partners, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie, searched the creek gravels of this area. On August 17, 1896 they found gold and staked the first four claims. A few days later at Forty Mile, Carmack registered the Discovery Claim in his own name, and one each for Charlie and Jim. Skookum Jim was sent to guard the claims on what Carmack renamed Bonanza Creek. Within days Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks had been staked from end to end, and when the news reached the outside the Klondike Gold Rush was on.

Word reached the outside world in 1897 when the ships carrying the wealthy Klondikers docked at San Francisco and Seattle. May of 1898 saw 4,735 boats of one kind or another carrying 28,000 people past a North West Mounted Police check point at Tagish Post, heading for Dawson and the Klondike.

The valley became the scene of hundreds of excited men tearing up the creek beds. Each claim was 500 feet wide. Smoke filled the air as fires smoldered in the shafts to thaw frozen ground. Hand-turned windlasses creaked as the buckets of half frozen muck were dumped out on the tailing piles, ready to be sluiced.

Soon every creek and hillside in the Klondike was being worked and the gold poured out in what appeared to be an endless stream.

The west coast cities, Victoria, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco reaped the benefits of outfitting miners, and loading the northbound ships with every conceivable necessity and luxury.

One by one the individual miners sold out to large companies who installed dredges on the creeks. The conveyor buckets dug to bedrock and turned the valleys into mounds of gravel. Massive tailing piles are reminders of the dredging operations. Eventually the gold ran out — over \$500 million dollars' worth is a conservative estimate.

Once again the valleys are quiet and the trees and shrubs are covering scars. There are small mining operations scattered here and there, and some gold is still to be found. There is a dwindling number who believe that somewhere in these ridges or valleys a mother lode is waiting to be discovered.

Meanwhile the Eldorado and Bonanza quietly murmur their way to join the Klondike River, as serenely as they did that summer of 1896 and only the stone cairn is left to mark the site where the Klondike Stampede began.

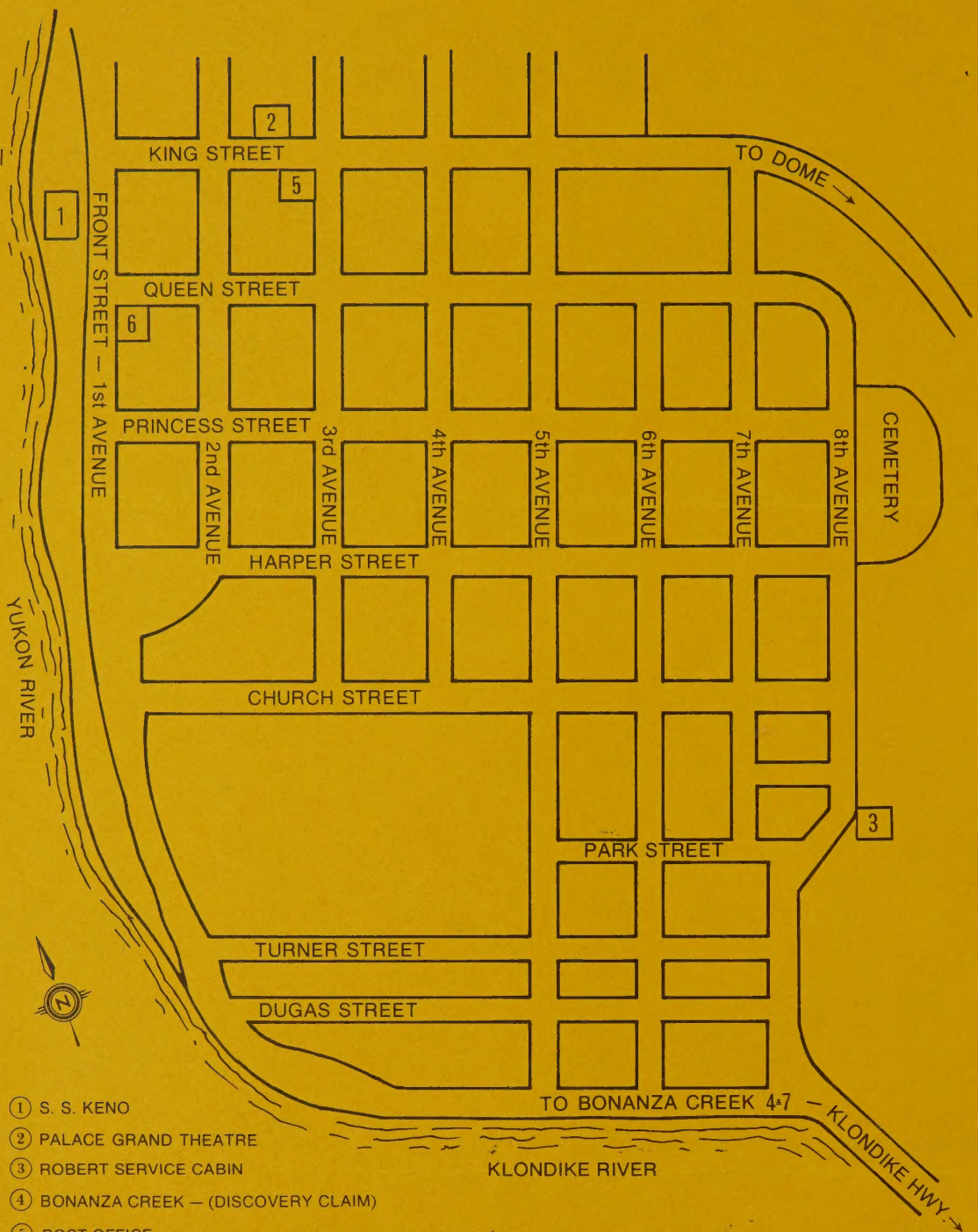
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Indian and Northern Affairs / Affaires indiennes et du Nord

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Published by Parks Canada under authority of
the Hon. Warren Allmand,
Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs
Ottawa, 1977
INA Publication No. QS-R028-000-EE-A1

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